

The What, Why, and How of Mindful Awareness

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Version 1

The practices and concepts that are presented in this document were discovered by many people from all over the world throughout history; Shinzen Young and Soryu Forall came up with the specific ways that they are presented here; I think the 't' on page three is mine.

What is Mindful Awareness?

Mindful Awareness can be defined as the use of three attentional skills:

1. Concentration Power
2. Sensory Clarity
3. Equanimity

When one is using these attentional skills in order to relate to the present moment, one is being *mindfully aware*.

Let's define them:

Concentration power – one's ability to remain focused on what one deems relevant at any given time.

Examples of Concentration Power in action:

During formal practice – refocusing on your breath after a period of mind wandering.

During life - refocusing on what your friend is telling you after a period of mind wandering.

Sensory Clarity – one's ability to accurately perceive their sensory experience.

Examples of Sensory Clarity in action:

During formal practice – noticing that the experience of 'breathing' is made up of two 'smaller' experiences: (1) you can feel your abdomen moving and (2) you can also feel air moving through your nostrils.

During life - noticing that the rhythm of the song that you are listening to has changed.

Equanimity – one's ability to allow sensory experience to come and go without *push* or *pull*. When you 'push experience away,' you think that it is unacceptable that you are experiencing what you are experiencing; you wish that your experience wasn't what it was; you wish your experience were different. When you 'pull experience towards,' you think that a certain experience is more acceptable than your present experience; you wish you were experiencing this other experience.

Examples of Equanimity in action:

During formal practice – a powerful, all-pervading, and genuine acceptance/love of one's knee pain.

During life – a powerful, all-pervading, and genuine acceptance/love of one's anxiety before giving a presentation.

Equanimity can be a confusing concept (i.e. of course knee pain and anxiety are bad!! What is Toby trying to say?! That I shouldn't work to eradicate knee pain and anxiety in my life?! That's preposterous!!). I'll try to address this confusion.

Mindfulness does not equal life. There is more to life than mindfulness. Mindfulness may be an important and substantial part of life, but it is not the entirety of what life is about.

Other parts of life include wisdom and morality. I would highly recommend using mindfulness in conjunction with wisdom and morality.

The general rule is to always engage mindfulness because it will always be helpful (details on the next page) and then, in addition, *if your sense of wisdom or morality deem it appropriate*, take objective action as well (such as get up from your cushion to relieve your knee pain or ask someone else to give the presentation because you are seriously freaking out).

In other words, practicing mindfulness is an effective way to achieve *happiness independent of conditions* (its true! If you practice accepting your knee pain, eventually it won't cause any suffering, how cool is that?!) and this is obviously a worth while pursuit. However, it is immoral and unwise to completely forget about *conditional happiness*.

Why Practice Mindful Awareness?

Increase fulfillment and decrease suffering.

As the main causes of mean actions are suffering and desire for fulfillment, mindful awareness allows you to be more kind.

How do you Practice Mindful Awareness?

There are three ways to practice:

1. Appreciate Self and World.
2. Transcend Self and World.
3. Improve Self and World.

Appreciate Self and World

For most people, this is a good starting point.

While Appreciating Self and World, we simply keep track of our sensory experience; there is no intention to have a lot of sensory experience, a little bit of sensory experience, this kind of sensory experience, that kind of sensory experience; we are just 'along for the ride,' 'here to watch the show.'

First, we need to learn about *the types of sensory experience*. Here is *one* way to slice the pie (of course there are an infinity of ways to categorize one's sensory experience).

Internal, subject experience is comprised of three things:

1. Mental image (picture an orange in your head, with your 'mind's eye;' can also be mental movies).
2. Mental talk (say the word 'orange' in you head, with your inner, mental voice that only you can hear; can also be sound, melody, or rhythm).
3. Emotional body sensation (how do oranges make you feel? No, just kidding, I won't leave you with that! An emotional body sensation is any felt, bodily sensation *that is the result of a thought or feeling*. Examples: an anxious knot in your abdomen before giving a presentation; or, champagne bubbles of excitement as you spot your old friend at the airport).

And their respective opposites:

1. Absence of mental image.
2. Absence of mental talk.
3. Absence of emotional body sensation/emotional peace.

External, objective experience is comprised of three things:

1. Physical sight (put a real orange in front of you and look at it).
2. Physical sound (listen to the sounds that are produced when you peel an orange).

3. Physical body sensation (touch an orange).

And their respective opposites:

1. A relaxed gaze at the world around you, (you are 'looking through, but not at an orange.' This may sound strange and indeed, it may take some *practice* in order to understand this type of experience, so simply don't worry about it right off the bat).
2. The absence of physical sound/silence (close your eyes and listen to an orange sitting still on a table).
3. The absence of physical body sensation (sometimes you just don't have that many sensations going on in a part of your body).

And there are two sensory experiences that we haven't covered:

1. Physical relaxation (muscles loosening, body settling).
2. The grey-scale blank (the mixture of lightness and darkness that you see when you close your eyes, but still try to see with your eyes, as if they were open).

We can group similar types of sensory experiences in the follow way:

Internal, subjective experiences:

Mental image
Mental talk
Emotional body sensation

External, objective experiences:

Physical sight
Physical sound
Physical body sensation

Experiences that could be described using the word 'restful':

Absence of mental image, a relaxed gaze, the grey-scale blank
Absence of mental talk, the absence of physical sound
Absence of emotional body sensation, the absence of physical body sensation, physical relaxation

An alternative way that we can group these types of sensory experience is:

Visual Experience:

Mental image	Physical sight	Absence of mental image, a relaxed gaze, the grey-scale blank
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Auditory Experience:

Mental talk	Physical sound	Absence of mental talk, the absence of physical sound
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Bodily experience:

Emotional body sensation	Physical body sensation	Absence of emotional body sensation, the absence of physical body sensation, physical relaxation
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And we can combine these two ways of grouping our sensory experience by creating a comprehensive table with meaningful axes:

Table 1	Internal, subjective	External, objective	Restful
Visual	Mental image	Physical sight	Absence of mental image, a relaxed gaze, the grey-scale blank
Auditory	Mental talk	Physical sound	Absence of mental talk, the absence of physical sound,
Bodily	Emotional body sensation	Physical body sensation	Absence of emotional body sensation, the absence of physical body sensation, physical relaxation

And there you have it!!

Dearest reader, your moment-by-moment experience of self and world is comprised of one or more of the boxes above.

Now that we understand the different kinds of sensory experiences, let us learn how to keep track of them (which, if you remember, is the whole point of the Appreciate Self and World way of practicing mindful awareness).

Noting is a technique that helps us keep track of our sensory experience. When we note a sensory experience, we do two things:

1. Acknowledge
2. Focus

For example, if we wish to note a physical sound, we would *acknowledge* and then *focus* upon the sound.

Here's the important part, though: when I say 'focus,' I don't mean 'half-ass-ingly, kinda pay attention to the sound.' What I mean is pay attention to the sound as if your life depended on it!! Really drill into it and notice every little detail that you can about the sound: Where is the sound coming from? Is the sound moving? Is it still? Is it far away? How loud is it? Is it getting louder? Is it constant or changing? How is it changing? Etc.

The key here is to cultivate *childlike curiosity* of, and *devastating fascination* with, the sound.

A metaphor that is often used to convey the noting process is *the shooting of a bow-and-arrow*. You pull back the bow and aim your arrow at a target (you *acknowledge* the sound) and then you shoot the arrow and the arrow penetrates the target (you *focus* intensely on the sound).

Thus, noting often takes substantial mental effort. However, as you will see with *practice*, noting can also take on quite passive flavors as well. Fitting metaphors here include: *a dry sponge soaking up water* (the dry sponge is the sound and your awareness is the water that seeps into every nook and cranny); or, my personal favorite, *a sound effortlessly massages your consciousness*.

Concept Check #1: Which attentional skill does the focus part of the noting process especially cultivate? Does it especially cultivate Concentration Power, Sensory Clarity, or Equanimity?

Now let's begin to combine what we've learned about the types of sensory experience with what we've learned about the noting process.

You can note (acknowledge and then focus upon) any type of sensory experience from Table 1. For example, you can note physical sounds, mental talk, emotional body sensations, etc.

The basic instructions for the Appreciate Self and World technique are simple:

Pick one or more types of sensory experience that you would like to note. We can call this type or group of sensory experiences your *focus range*. As experiences within your focus range naturally arise, note them.

Of course other experiences – ones outside your focus range – will also arise and grab your attention. That's fine, let these other experiences come and go, *but let them come and go in the background of your awareness*; in the foreground of your awareness is your focus range; its Ok if some of your awareness gets diverted toward background thoughts, sounds, etc. but try to keep most of your attention on noting experiences in your focus range; as best you can, direct all strands of your awareness toward your focus range.

Background hums aside, sometimes experiences outside of our focus range can fully consume our awareness for seconds or even minutes and during these periods our poor focus range is no where to be found. This is called 'mind wandering' or 'spacing out.' It is crucial to understand that every meditator spaces out sometimes, that the exercises are designed to make this happen, that spacing out is part of what you sign up for when you decide to meditate and that therefore: SPACING OUT IS NOT A BAD THING, IT'S A REGULAR THING. And therefore...if you space out, abstain from beating your self up and simply return to your focus range.

!!The all-important smile trick!! helps you abstain from beating yourself up: after realizing that you were spacing out, take a deep breath and relax, then smile, really physically smile with your mouth, make it big, make it proud!, and tell yourself, "its Ok that I was just spacing out, the exercise that I am doing is difficult and is designed to make me space out sometimes, therefore this really isn't a bad thing at all, its all just part of the process of building my attentional skills, phew! I love myself, I am my own best friend," let this sentiment seep in (which may take time and energy), but really don't move on until you truly believe what you are saying, then gently return to noting experiences that arise within your focus range.

All this smiling and self-best friending may seem tedious, but the whole process speeds up and eases up with a little practice. And think about what you are practicing!! You are practicing being nice to yourself, abstaining from harsh self-judgment, being your own best friend for goodness sakes!! If that's not a skill that we could all use, I don't know what is. Trust me, it is such a relief to begin to systematically cultivate this skill; it's the epitome of 'applicable to life'!!

Concept Check #2: What attentional skill does the smile trick especially cultivate? Does it especially cultivate Concentration Power, Sensory Clarity, or Equanimity?

As you can see, you can custom build your own Appreciate Self and World practice. You like noting mental images and emotional body sensations? Go for it! You like noting physical body sensations and physical sight? Have fun! Thus, the Appreciate Self and World way of practicing mindful awareness is *versatile* (in that the practitioner can work with any and all forms of their sensory experience) and

allows for substantial *practitioner agency* (in that the practitioner can choose what type(s) of sensory experience to note). The ramifications of this versatility and practitioner agency are so vast and especially interesting to me that I am conducting a research study this fall on the topic, so stay tuned!

In general, when engaged in an Appreciate Self and World technique, try to note a sensory experience about once every five seconds or so. An easy way to make sure that you can maintain this rhythm is by always including respective restful states in your focus range. For example, if you choose to focus on mental talk, include mental quiet in your focus range as well; or, if you choose to focus on emotional body sensation, include absence of emotional body sensation in your focus range as well. When you set up your focus ranges like this, you'll always have something to explore; either you will be talking or you won't; either you will be feeling emotion in your body or you won't; either way you can note something every five seconds or so.

Now that we understand noting, let's learn about *labels*.

Labels are short phrases that we use during practice in order to keep track of when and what we are noting. We can say them out loud or say them to ourselves, in our head, as a form of intentional mental talk. In general, you *acknowledge* the sensory experience, and then say the corresponding label, and then *focus* upon the sensory experience. Thus, each label is paired with a process of noting; each time you label, you note! Here are the standard labels:

Table 2	Internal, subjective	External, objective	Restful
Visual	See In	See Out	See Rest
Auditory	Hear In	Hear Out	Hear Rest
Bodily	Feel In	Feel Out	Feel Rest

After comparing Table 1 with Table 2, we realize that one label can refer to more than one type of sensory experience. For example, Feel Rest can refer to 'the absence of emotional body sensation, the absence of physical body sensation, or physical relaxation.' Not all labels are like this (for example, See Out only refers to physical sight), but some are, so don't get confused!!

Concept Check #3: List the three types of sensory experience with which you could use the label See Rest.

As I said above, labels are helpful because they help us keep track of when and what we are noting. In terms of the 'when' side of things: You are forced to be explicitly aware of when you note because you have to say the label in your head or out loud and each label only corresponds to one noting process. In terms of the 'what' side of things: You are forced to be explicitly aware of the type of experience you are about

to note because you have to say the label in your head or out loud and each label only corresponds to one or a few types of sensory experience.

Just think of labels as tools that help you keep track of an admittedly confusing practice. Again, each time you label, you note.

Concept Check #4: What is the difference between noting and labels?

To combine what we know about the noting process with what we've learned about labels, a focus on physical sound practice session might look something like:

You hear a sound...you *acknowledge* the sound...you say the label, *Hear Out* to yourself...you *focus* intensely on the sound...

A focus on internal, subjective experience might look something like:

You talk to yourself...you *acknowledge* the mental talk...you say the label *Hear In* out loud...you *focus* intensely on the mental talk.....You stop talking to your self...you *acknowledge* the absence of mental talk...you say the label *Hear Rest* out loud...you *focus* intensely on the mental silence...

Common Appreciate Self and World focus ranges include:

- Focus on Self:

See In, See Rest
Hear In, Hear Rest
Feel In, Feel Rest

- Focus on World:

See Out, See Rest
Hear Out, Hear Rest
Feel Out, Feel Rest

- Focus on Rest:

See Rest
Hear Rest
Feel Rest

- Focus on just one or two of the boxes.
- Focus on Everything:

See In, See Out, See Rest
Hear In, Hear In, Hear Rest
Feel In, Feel Out, Feel Rest

But like I said, be creative!!

Transcend Self and World

There are three ways to transcend self and world:

1. Expansion/Contraction
2. Gone
3. Do Nothing

Expansion/Contraction is a noting technique, just like all the Appreciate Self and World stuff covered above. However, the only two labels you have to work with are...Expansion and Contraction!! Examples of expansive experiences include: a sound getting louder, a body sensation getting bigger, a thought expanding your attention into the future, etc. Examples of contractive experiences include: a sound getting softer, a body sensation getting smaller, watching your attention contract around a thought, etc. As you can see, identifying expansive or contractive flavors of your sensory experience isn't an exact science, so just relax and fun with it ('well, this sound seems kinda expansive to me...um, that body sensation seems to be contractive') and don't worry about labeling your experiences perfectly. All you are doing is reducing the entirety of your sensory experience to the two basic flavors of expansion and contraction. Also, be aware that both flavors can arise at the same time and that if this happens you can just focus on one of them or focus on both of them at once. A period of expansion/contraction practice might look something like:

You hear a sound...you *acknowledge* an expansive flavor of the sound (perhaps it is getting louder)...you say the label *Expansion* to yourself...you intensely *focus* on that expansive flavor...

Gone is a noting practice when you acknowledge and focus on the *vanishing of all or part of a sensory experience*. Examples of gones include: a wave of mental talk ending, a body sensation disappearing, part of a sound dropping off, etc. Basically, you try to be hyper-present during the transitions from 'sensory experience happening' to 'sensory experience not happening;' what are these transitions like? What do they feel like? Can you experience them really clearly? A period of gone practice might look something like:

You hear that a sound is ending...you *acknowledge* that the sound is ending...you intensely *focus* on the ending of the sound...the sound ends...you say the label 'Gone' out loud in order to remind yourself that you just witnessed a vanishing...

Notice that we used the label after we noted, not while we noted.

Everything that has been covered up to now involves the intentional directing of one's attention. Indeed, when we note, we acknowledge an experience and then intentionally focus upon it with our attention. However, Do Nothing breaks this pattern and is therefore in a league of its own. The instructions for Do Nothing are simple: *If you notice an intention to direct your attention, drop that intention.*

There are a few subtleties that are worth going over. If you drop into a deeply relaxed, blissful state, good, you are doing the technique perfectly. If you are constantly thinking about this and that and are not focused at all, good, you are doing the technique perfectly (again, we have no intention in regards to our attention). Make sure you aren't intentionally keeping track of whether you have intentions, that would be an intention! If you can't drop an intention, it's no longer an intention, so don't try to drop it.

Alternative ways to think about the Do Nothing technique:

1. One big smile trick (oh, I'm listening to the lawn mower, *perfect....*oh, I'm feeling excited for tomorrow, *perfect....*oh, I'm spacey, *perfect.....*oh, I don't understand this exercise, *perfect....*).
2. You are not meditating, *you are being meditated upon* by the attentional skills that you have worked so hard to develop during Appreciate and Improve Self and World practice.

As you can tell, the Transcend Self and World techniques are somewhat confusing. Therefore, I would recommend being in contact with me or another qualified facilitator when you first begin to explore them, so we can answer questions that come up. Also, it helps to have built up your attentional skills (Concentration Power, Sensory Clarity, and Equanimity) through Appreciate or Improve Self and World techniques at least a little bit before trying out these exercises.

Improve Self and World

While doing Appreciate Self and World exercises, we worked with the natural flow of experience; we didn't have any preferences as to what came up; we were just there 'to watch the show.'

Improving Self and World is similar in that we are noting sensory experience, but different in that we *intentionally create positive content to focus on*. For example, instead of waiting for mental talk to erupt naturally, we intentionally say, "love, love, love," or something else that makes us feel good.

There are three spaces within which we can intentionally cultivate positive content:

1. Mental talk (say, “love, love, love”).
2. Mental image (imagine a heart with your mind’s eye).
3. Emotional body sensation (cultivate pleasant, loving sensations in your body).

There are six kinds of positive content that we can choose to cultivate:

1. Positive emotions (love, compassion, honesty, etc.).
2. Positive behavior (working hard, remembering people’s names, quitting cigarettes, etc.).
3. Positive ideal (your godmother, Frodo, Jesus, the Buddha).
4. Positive situation (graduating high school, getting a raise, your friend healing from cancer, etc.).
5. Positive cognition/thought (when I’m at home, every time I think of my job, I’m going to relax and tune into the sounds around me; or, before leaving the house every morning, I will think of everything that I will need throughout the day and make sure that I have these things with me; etc.).
6. Other positive (any other positive content that you can think of!).

The basic instructions for Improve Self and World are simple: pick a space (talk, image, or body) and a kind of positive content (emotion, behavior, ideal, situation, cognition, or other), intentionally create the positive content, and then note that experience over and over again. Don’t worry about labeling your intentional positive content; just note it (while saying, ‘love, love, love,’ you don’t have to use the label Hear In, that would just be overwhelming).

A few subtleties:

You can pick more than one space (talk, image, or body) to work with at once. In fact, I would recommend this because they can trigger each other. For example, mental talk and mental image can trigger associated emotional body sensations (which can sometimes be hard to conjure). Another way to help conjure emotional body sensation is to say to yourself stuff like, “how would I feel if...” or, “this is how I will feel when...”

If you choose to work with mental talk, you can intentionally say words, phrases, sentences, or even paragraphs worth of content and you can say the words fast or slow. If you choose to work with mental image you can intentionally cultivate a single image, multiple images, or mental movies.

If you choose to work with positive situations, don’t just meditate on positive situations for yourself; make sure to meditate upon other people experiencing positive situations too!

If you realize that you haven't been cultivating or noting positive content, use the smile trick!

Lastly, while these Improve Self and World exercises may seem silly and ineffective, they're not!! Let me tell you about a telling psychological study that supports my stance. They taught two groups of people how to throw darts. One group spent five days practicing throwing darts. The other group spent one day practicing throwing darts and four days *visualizing them selves throwing darts*. Guess which group improved more at throwing darts after the five days. The visualizers!! This means that if you want to change yourself for the better, visualizing (and other subjective cultivations) is worth your while.

FAQs and Important Points

1. In general, it is a good idea to start with the Appreciate Self and World exercises because they do a great job building your attentional skills (Concentration Power, Sensory Clarity, and Equanimity). Once you have strengthened your attentional skills, aim toward equally balancing the three ways of practicing mindful awareness: Appreciate Self and World, Transcend Self and World, and Improve Self and World. This constitutes a balanced, comprehensive psycho-spiritual workout plan.
2. There are four common postures: laying down, sitting down, standing, and walking. No matter what posture you choose, make sure you are comfortable, as you may want to practice for long periods of time. If you are sitting, make sure that your knees are below your hips, this allows your pelvis to rotate forward and your back to straighten; the axes of your hips, shoulders, and ears should all fall on one plane while your lower back curves in from the plane; think of your spine as a sturdy tree trunk that stands tall and upright, and then let the rest of your body (shoulders, rib cage, jaw) simply hang off of the trunk like snow-laden bows. You can open, partly open, or close your eyes. You can make hand mudras.

Do you feel antsy or sleepy when you practice? Choosing postures that counteract your tendency can be helpful:

<Postures that make you more awake-----Postures that make you more relaxed>

Walking	Standing	Sitting	Laying down
Eyes open	Eyes partially open		Eyes closed
Hand mudra			No hand mudra

3. When starting out, no need to push yourself. Learning how to meditate can be treated like learning any other hobby or skill; think of it like learning to play the piano or something. Doing five minutes of practice a day is great! You don't feel like practicing one day? That's fine, just make sure to do it tomorrow. As time goes on, you'll begin to have powerful experiences and then you won't be able to stop practicing, haha!
4. If you ask musicians why they love playing, many would say stuff like, "oh man, when you're on stage and you rip a heart felt solo that beautifully expresses a deep sentiment, that's the stuff I play for." And few musicians would say stuff like, "oh man, I just love practicing A-scales in my basement." Similarly, meditation is not about blissing out on the cushion and it is about using your attentional skills in daily life. Sitting down to take part in one of

the formal exercises explained above is like practicing scales, utilizing your attentional skills while you walk to work, or even better, while having an argument is like shredding a heart felt solo up on stage.

There are two ways to do this:

1. Pick one technique and stick with it all day ('I'm going to note physical sounds all day'). You can pick a new technique to try everyday, every few days, every week, etc until you find one that you like and then just always do that technique. Some of my favorites are See Out (when is it not helpful to be aware of what's in front of you?), Feel Out (your body's certainly always there to pay attention to!), and Focus on Self – See In, Hear In, and Feel In (this clarifies your thinking process, which is obviously helpful in day to day life).
 2. Maintain a Focus on Everything practice all day (this is nice because you can adjust what type of sensory experience you note depending on your circumstance - are you listening to a lecture? Hear Out! Are you on a beautiful hike? See Out! Are you anxious? Feel In! Are you trying to go to bed? Feel Rest! Etc.).
5. The most obvious way in which labels help is to let you know if you are spacing out. If, as far as you can tell, you haven't said a label in three minutes, its unlikely that you've been noting many sensory experiences over the past three minutes (i.e., you've been spacing out). However, if you remember saying fifty or sixty labels over the past three minuets, it's likely that you have been mindfully noting away! Of course, labeling doesn't equal noting, but they are often found together. You will need to *practice* in order to understand this point fully.

Considering the last two points, if you practice in daily life, you'll say thousands of labels in a day, a tall order indeed, and not an easy thing to do, but worth it!!

6. "Using the labels is awkward and confusing, I don't want to!"

At the end of the day, you don't have to use the labels for the noting process is all that is important. However, don't throw them out too fast! Trust me, they are really helpful, *once you get used to using them*. A helpful analogy: Do you remember what it was like learning how to drive a car? You had to keep an inordinate number of things in mind at once: gas, brake, steering wheel, turn signals, mirrors, traffic laws, speed limits, etc. At first, this seemed overwhelming and perhaps you thought you could never get used to driving. However, with just a little bit of practice, you found yourself driving down the freeway with a barrio in hand, music blasting, and a distracting friend in

the passenger seat as much of the driving has become second nature. Learning to use labels follows a similar trajectory. At first they may seem awkward, distracting, and confusing. However, once you get used to using them, they become second nature; saying Hear In after a burst of mental talk is almost hard *not* to do; at this point the labels become an extraordinary tool kit that can dramatically deepen your practice for again, they help you keep track of when and what you are noting. So hang in there!

7. “Doesn’t saying Hear Rest disrupt the mental silence or physical silence that I am trying to focus on?”

Don’t worry about disrupting mental or physical silence by using labels; while they technically do disrupt the silence, remember that the label’s purpose is to help you keep track of when you are noting mental or physical silence, so just let it do its job.

8. “Do I say Hear In each time I say a label in my head? After all, the labels are a form of mental talk.”

Labels are simply different from other forms of sensory experience. You don’t have to label them; labeling labels would, after all, immediately get ridiculous (‘See Out, Hear In, Hear In, Hear In, Hear In...’) for the only label you would end up using would be Hear In.

9. “When I note a sensory experience, I feel like just hanging out in the focus part. For example, I’ll acknowledge a sound and then focus on the sound, and I’ll just continue to focus on the sound and I don’t feel the need to acknowledge it repeatedly, I just ‘hop on and stay on.’ Is that cool?”

Totally! Go for it. In general, noting practice involves brief periods of focus, but if you feel like just staying focused on something, that’s great, its actually evidence of high concentration!

10. “I feel like I have thoughts that don’t perfectly fit into the categories of mental image or mental talk. How should I deal with these?”

Many people report this. I would say three things. First, just let that stuff come and go like any other sensory experience that is outside of your focus range. In general, these kinds of sensory experiences are in the minority, so there should still be plenty of image and talk to work with.

Second, over a long period of time, noting image and talk seems to train your brain to use these modalities more often when it has to process information; the exercises seem to train you to talk explicitly in your head and imagine vividly; the exercises seem to convert amorphous processing into explicit grammatical and visual experience. Now, this may sound scary and weird,

but it's actually brilliant! Thinking in this explicit fashion can increase the conceptual clarity of your thoughts and make them far easier to equanimize. It's hard to explain, you really have to experience the shift to understand the benefits.

Third, it's likely that a lot of what you are experiencing actually is talk or image, but you're simply not experiencing the thoughts with a high enough level of sensory clarity to see their true nature. Therefore, really focus on the experiences and try to pick out any visual or auditory component to them in order to increase your sensory clarity and you will begin to see their true visual or auditory nature.

You may have noticed that the last two points are somewhat antagonistic. Does your brain get trained to use explicit talk and image or has it always used explicit talk and image and you begin to see this once you have a high enough level of sensory clarity?? To be honest, I don't know which explanation is truer. Perhaps different people relate more to one explanation than the other? Regardless, the overall trend is the same in both explanations: more explicitly auditory and visual experience and less amorphous experience.

11. "Whenever I use the label Hear In, my mental talk stops in its tracks;" or, "When I am looking for mental talk, it never comes up." "Am I doing something wrong?"

Paying attention to our sensory experience can affect our sensory experience in all sorts of ways. This is a common example of this phenomenon. Just role with it, have fun noting mental quiet!; again, while practicing Appreciate Self and World, we have no expectations as to how much or what kind of sensory experience arises, we're just here 'to watch the show,' not matter what the show is.

12. *Zooming* is a fun thing to play with. Let's say physical body sensations are in your focus range. You can 'zoom in' on the physical body sensations that are happening in your right big toe; then you can 'zoom out' a little and focus on the physical body sensations happening in your right leg; then you can 'zoom way out' and pay attention to all of the physical body sensations that are happening throughout your whole body, all at once! You can zoom within all of your sense modalities: zoom in on a specific sound, zoom out and listen the sounds happening all around you; zoom in on the orange sitting in front of you, zoom out and see your entire visual field at once; zoom in on a mental image, zoom out and focus on your whole mind; etc.
13. In general, it is a good idea to do a variety of meditative exercises: zoom in on a small part of a sensory experience and stay with it for as long as you can (this especially exercises your concentration and clarity); zoom out and work

with many types of sensory experience (this especially cultivates your equanimity); do it all! If we think of meditating as attentional fitness training, doing a variety of meditative exercises is like working out your upper body *and* your lower body, doing cardio *and* strength training; its simply common sense.

14. Exclusive vs. Inclusive noting is another option to play with. Exclusive noting is when, if more than one sensory experience arises within your focus range, you just note one of them. Inclusive noting is when you note them both at the same time.
15. If you are experiencing emotional or physical pain, you can either ‘turn towards’ the experience or ‘turn away’ from the experience. Let’s say that you have a physical pain in your leg. Turning towards the experience would mean noting the pain (as the pain is physical, you would use the label Feel Out). Turning away from the pain would mean noting any other sensory experience (such as physical sound, mental talk, gones, a nurture positive etc.). When turning away, let the pain be there in the background, but in the foreground is your focus range. Experiment with both turning towards and turning away to see what works best for you.

During over whelming emotional experiences, an exercise that I’ve found incredibly helpful is to divide up my subjective experience into mental image, mental talk, and emotional body sensation components. Differentiating painful emotional body sensations from negative thoughts seems to dramatically reduce the amount of suffering that I experience. Try it and see for yourself!

16. While you are supposed to pay attention to the way in which your sensory experience changes over time in all of the above exercises, it can sometimes be helpful to especially focus on this theme. If you want to do this, use these labels:

Table 3	Change
Visual	See Flow
Auditory	Hear Flow
Bodily	Feel Flow

As all sensory experiences (internal, external, and restful) can change, we can use the above labels when we are noting any of the types of sensory experiences laid out in Table 1. For example, if you wanted to especially pay attention to how sound changes, you would use the Hear Flow label every time that you noted a sound (instead of the standard Hear Out label); if you wanted to especially pay attention to how your mental talk flowed in and out of awareness, you would use the Hear Flow label every time that you noted your mental talk (instead of the standard Hear In label); if you wanted to pay attention to how mental silence ‘buzzes’ in your mind, you would use the Hear Flow label, instead of the standard Hear Rest label.

Using the word ‘flow’ (as opposed to in, out, or rest) is simply meant to help you pay attention to the way in which your experience is changing, which, as I said, can be helpful sometimes.

Answers to Concept Check Questions

1. Think of the questions that I told you to ask while focusing on a sensory experience (where is it? Is it changing? How is it changing? Etc.). These are all questions that increase how *accurately you perceive a sensory experience*, which is the definition of Sensory Clarity given on pg. 3. Thus, the focus part of the noting process especially cultivates Sensory Clarity.
2. The smile trick helps us to accept in a genuine way the fact that recently we were not noting. Therefore, it helps us to let the experience of ‘I was spacing out’ come into awareness without pushing it away. As the definition of equanimity is ‘one’s ability to allow sensory experience to come and go without push or pull,’ the smile trick especially helps us cultivate equanimity.
3. See Rest can refer to mental quiet, the grey-scale blank, or a relaxed view of the world around you (refer to Table 1).
4. Noting involves acknowledging and then focusing upon sensory experience. Labels are short phrases that we can say to our selves or out loud each time we note something. Thus, labels facilitate noting.